



Dr Sylvester  
and the  
Tapestry  
of Time

Paul Kercal

**Tapestry. n.** A piece of fabric or canvas bearing pictures formed by the skilful weaving of coloured threads, fabrics or silks.

**Time. n.** An indefinite progression of existence, events or matter. A unit contained within the past, present or future.

**Dr Sylver. pers.** Librarian and keeper of the books of the recent past, present and near future.

# The diaries of days yet to come

**J**amie Meek was a runner, though rarely by choice.

He had run from many things during the latter half of his fifteen years on a planet he barely understood: from one bully to the next, from an explosive family which had disintegrated noisily around him and then, most recently, from one world to another. Somehow Jamie had become the invited guest of a dimension which was bigger, and often scarier, than anything he could ever imagine; a realm of light, shadow, grace and despair.

On the first day back at school following the Easter holidays, Jamie found himself running all over again and this time it was from as unexpected a place as any he had been in during the past few years: this time he was running away from his closest friend and his form tutor. One of them had asked

Jamie a question which made him desperate to get to the other side of the building as quickly as he could without any thought of hesitation or consequence. Jamie Meek didn't think of the people he left behind or the troubles he might encounter as he ran down school corridors that had a strict and easily exceeded speed limit. All he thought about was the destination.

In fact his mind was so focused elsewhere that he failed to notice that, matching every step he made, there were two shadows and only one was his...

"Jamie, can you take this book back to the library for me?" the form tutor asked as his year 10 class began to leave for the first lesson of the morning.

In contrast to the speed he would soon reach Jamie moved slowly towards Mr Laurence's desk to collect the book to be returned. It wasn't that he wanted to appear rude or unhelpful but the past few months had changed him. Fear would have made Jamie walk faster; fear of what his friends would think of him for moving too quickly or what others would think if he said no. Fear, until recently had been the emotion that had driven him. But a few short weeks before the Easter holidays Jamie had beaten the fear which had once controlled him and that was affecting him in good and bad ways. It was liberating to not have to worry about what others thought, that was for sure. But sometimes he could be a little too relaxed about what others thought. He barely looked up from the floor as he walked, deep in thought at what had once been. Any mention of the library seemed to have that effect on him nowadays and none of his friends could point to anything even closely resembling a reason why. Once it had been the place he found the most comfort and security in, now it seemed to be the exact opposite.

Charlotte walked beside her friend, as confused by this new-found mood as their teacher was. Mr Laurence signed a 'sorry' to her for the delay this conversation would cause them in getting to their next class and she returned the comment with a hand movement of her own, more graceful and assured yet similarly clear to read: 'np'. No problems.

Despite the gentle worry he felt about whether this short chat with Jamie would have as little effect as all other attempts seemed to have had the short signed conversation was a welcome relief and almost made the teacher laugh out loud. It was a strange feeling to know that he could communicate more easily with the only deaf and non-speaking member of his class than with Jamie himself and a simple truth struck Mr Laurence: being able to hear obviously didn't mean that you could listen. As much as Jamie seemed currently disconnected from the world Charlotte seemed more instinctively aware of what was happening around her than ever. Whether people had spoken aloud, used sign language or communicated solely on body language she seemed to be the most intuitive of anyone in his class, especially when it came to Jamie's current mood. Already Charlotte had guessed that the teacher's suggestion was the latest in a series of attempts to find some way to get her friend to discuss his feelings and, for the moment, she was happy to play along even though she felt nervous about being late for their first lesson of the morning.

“Anytime today, I don't think she'll be expecting the book back this soon anyway,” the teacher added, hoping that the reverse psychology might move Jamie a little quicker as he moved at his own, slow, pace. To that extent it had the effect Mr Laurence was looking for: all three of them were surprised at how quickly Jamie's head jerked upwards from the floor at long last.

She...

A female librarian? Take the book back to the school's female librarian. On the face of it it seemed such an innocent suggestion.

For his first three years at St Philip's secondary school Jamie Meek had spent a large percentage of the breaks between lessons hiding in the library from people who wanted to bully him. Over time he had been increasingly befriended by the Librarian, Dr Sylver, and while most saw her as someone who looked after the school's reference books in the main library Jamie had come to discover that she was something less expected. When things had seemed most confusing, the Librarian had been a calming source of advice

and of strength but, much more than that, they had come to meet and talk in the most unusual place he could ever have imagined: the Library of Everything.

The *other* library in St Philip's school was a room which housed a huge collection of books that told anyone, well, anyone who was able to read them, what was going to happen over the next year, not just things that had happened in the past. It was a storehouse of knowledge and forewarning and the person who looked after it was not just your average librarian, she was an angel in disguise and held the keys to a wealth of strange possibility.

The strangest thing was how similar and how different both Dr Sylver and the library looked when they were doing God's side of things. The school library was much like any other. It had books on shelves and posters on walls. It contained reading charts to be followed and notices to be ignored. That was the room that he and most of the people at his school expected to see when they stepped through the doorway.

The Library of Everything was different in almost every respect: the windows were full of colourful pictures and the shelves glowed gently despite being made from a rough and richly coloured wood. All around the room candles stood: tall or broad, on the floor or on polished metal frames which seemed too graceful to hold up such a weight of wax and wick, each as big as Jamie or larger still and they pulsed with a bright and pure living light. Into everything in the room intricate and detailed images had been carved giving the Library of Everything the feel of an inverted Cathedral. The room itself might have been made up of straight angles, the shape of the school room itself, but the architectural decoration it contained gave the space life and energy. If anyone said the Devil was in the detail they obviously hadn't seen some of the more intricate pieces of art God had on display.

Every book housed in God's library was similarly unusual. Each one was covered in red or white leather with a date printed on the spine and decorated in gold leaf, yet it was on the inside of each book that the most important change could be seen. On the thick parchment pages were printed

incredibly ornate words; curling, colourful and enthusiastically restrained. In some of the books, the ones where the date on the spine had passed, the words captured and described everything that had happened in a specific geographic area. They were a diary of the thoughts, actions and non-actions of Jamie Meek and his family, his friends and their families, their relatives, their teachers, their neighbours, their enemies and many more people besides. The books detailed everything that had been said, done and thought by a wide cast of players.

Odd though it was to have books that seemed to know so much about the past few months they were not the strangest held in the Library of Everything. The books covered in red leather had dates printed on them that had *not* yet passed... they were the diaries of the days yet to come and printed on their pages were words that still moved. The red books contained sentences and paragraphs which wrote and re-wrote themselves, hurrying from page to page and changing with every human decision yet to be made. Each word was at the mercy of the possibility it described and one changed option could see entire pages re-written almost instantly as the new action affected everyone around it. They were the documentation of flux; everything happening to a plan which had been written so long ago yet still seemed happy to be open and adaptable.

And then, even as Jamie was struggling to try to understand even a fraction of the Library and his place in it, Dr Sylver had disappeared and seemingly taken not only all of the books but also the room itself away with her. One day she was there and then, the next, she was not: written out of a story to be replaced by a new librarian who students would have said had been at their school for as long as they had. Mr Wellingham was, to everyone except Jamie, the person who you went to if you were looking for a book to help you with your work. To Jamie he was one more layer of confusion in a year that had seen him question everything that surrounded him, seen and unseen... Mr Wellingham was a reminder of the mystery of the disappearing Librarian and the blurring of the visible and the invisible.

But his teacher had asked Jamie to take the book back to HER.

Could she be back? Even as Jamie asked the question in his mind the answer seemed to come to him as positively as if someone standing in front of him had said it aloud.

‘Yes.’

Not an answer really, not a word for word reply, just a feeling beyond description and a knowledge that it was true. Without hesitation, Jamie had taken the book the teacher held towards him and sped away from of the classroom. He didn't wait to let Mr Laurence and Charlotte know where he was going, or even why he was running, because he knew that he wouldn't have been able to find the words or signed movements to explain his impulsive reaction. If Jamie had stopped, even for a second, he might have looked back and laughed to see the stunned expression on their faces but, before they had a chance to react, he was already gone.

Less than four minutes after he took the book and ran, breathless as he arrived at the entrance to the library, Jamie found himself stopping for the first time since he left the form room.

Now, finally, he found himself questioning what had just happened as he held the door handle to the room that had proven so confusing over the past few years. The faith and hope that had exploded in his mind seemed to disappear and suddenly the conviction he had felt began to melt away.

What if he was wrong?

What if he had misheard what his teacher said?

What if it wasn't Dr Sylver but a different librarian?

Jamie's hand shook slightly as his head spun from one possibility to another, barely waiting for an answer to the questions he asked himself before the next worry was vocalised. The metal of the handle felt no different... had he expected it to? It felt cold and smooth just as it should, being a smooth, metal, door handle.

Jamie's mind was so taken up with concern and hesitation that all of his external senses dulled. He did not feel how cold nor how dark the corridor had become as he ran through it,

as if a thin, black gauze were stretched over every light and window pane. All Jamie thought about was whether he would open the door to an answer or to yet more questions. He did not notice the shadows behind him begin to congeal into one shape, slipping, for the moment, away from the library. Jamie did not see the room as the darkness that surrounded him did. All the shadow wanted was to see what was to come as the boy found himself back in this place of chaos and change. It did not want to be seen, not just yet.

Still the wait was maddening and the shadow began to wonder if it might just reach out a little and cause more hurt and upset in some way, somehow. It trembled in anticipation and began to consider other options that might be open. The corridor became a fraction colder and the shadow considered pouncing. It looked at Jamie's hand on the door handle and narrowed its focus.

And then a thought without words popped into his mind and Jamie Meek finally opened the door before he even realised he was moving. He pushed himself into the room with an effort, praying and hoping and only partially expecting...

As soon as the door swung open and he looked into the room he saw that it was true... For a long, silent, second Jamie stood motionless having only taken a hesitant half step into the room. He stared at Dr Sylver and she looked back at him, both waiting for the other to speak. Each had so many questions to ask yet neither knew how to begin or what to say first. And then the Librarian smiled and Jamie grinned back at her and, for the moment, everything was all right.

"Come in, Jamie," she said at last. "Welcome back to the library."

As Jamie shut the door behind him he didn't notice the shadow creep forwards to look through the window set into the door. It stopped and watched the two friends who had been reunited. The darkness looked from one smile to the other and hissed. Then, having seen enough for the moment, it retraced the route followed now that the end had begun. It was happy to know that some things were progressing just as had been anticipated. Soon enough the Librarian would

know what she, and all who stood with her, were up against... Soon she and Jamie would both know how hopeless their futures had become. Before they knew it the war would begin. The fight seemed unfair in a way. A group of schoolchildren against the blackest, ugliest nastiest forces that the dark realm could throw against them.

From a place within the shadow an ugly, rasping laugh could be heard as it faded from one part of the school to another and then away from the building, just for a while. It had other tasks to move on to and a great game to play. The Librarian was a part of it, as were Jamie and his friends, but the promise was still to be completed and they were only one part of a far grander scheme to bring about a great deal of suffering...

And then the end of everything.



**War is coming**

## **About the author**

*Paul Kercal = youth worker, college teacher, husband, dad, ex-computer games artist, doodler, writer and part time gardener on a social action weekend (15, 5, 14, 13/9, 10, 27, 8 and 7 years respectively).*

*He can be found behind an iMac teaching computer arts and animation, behind a Mac mini writing or frowning at emails, a Macbook on a number 34 bus writing and being bounced around and behind a metal bladed bush whacker during Ready 4 Action. It's good to mix things up occasionally.*

*Dr Sylver and the Tapestry of Time is his seventh work and third book in the Dr Sylver series. For more information check out the blog at: [kercal.website.com](http://kercal.website.com).*

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